

‘Life and Times of Gora’: exploring Gandhi’s atheist associate

[PTI](#)

New Delhi, December 13, 2009

A champion of atheism and critic of the caste system in pre-independence [India](#), ‘Gora’, an almost forgotten figure of the national movement has been revisited by an American author who seeks to establish the impact of his views on Mahatma Gandhi in a book.

Goparaju Ramachandra Rao, or ‘Gora’ was a radical figure who rebelled against the caste-based systems in Indian society, reacting by renouncing religion and propagating atheism as a way towards equality.

American musicologist and of late a chronicler of Indian [history](#), Mark Lindley’s recently released book ‘The Life and Times of Gora’ seeks to comprehend the reformer vis-à-vis his time and his relationship with Mahatma Gandhi.

Gora, as he called himself after embracing atheism, was born in a Brahmin family in 1902. Excommunicated from the Brahmin society for renouncing religion, he made social reform his life’s motive that also brought him in touch with the Mahatma.

“Gora was in some ways a bridge between the Mahatma and Ambedkar. Gandhiji’s association with him was partly responsible for the change in his views on Ambedkar’s beliefs on caste system,” says Mr. Lindley.

While Ambedkar was for uprooting the caste system, Gandhiji’s approach was milder; he wanted the negative aspects of caste system like untouchability to go while retaining its framework.

Gandhiji came in contact with Gora late in his life, during 1944-45, following which his views on caste system saw a change,” says Mr. Lindley.

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My Life is My Message

July 27, 2015

Every week, we feature excerpts by Gandhi that lend insight into his values and personal practices.

Gandhi had a change in his attitude towards atheism between 1941 and 1948 thanks to his interaction with Gora (Goparaju Ramachandra Rao) and family. Their extraordinary efforts to eradicate untouchability inspired Gandhi. [An Atheist With Gandhi](#) is a booklet where Gora describes from the first correspondence they had; to their first personal contact; to how Gandhi invited him to stay as an inmate at the Sevagram ashram and, then, his coworkers, wife (Saraswathi) and his whole

family; to the agreement to marry Gora's and Saraswathi's eldest daughter (Manorama) with an "untouchable" and switching "God" for "Truth" during the ceremony. In fact, it was at the Sevagram ashram where his 14 year old son [Lavanam](#) -- which means "Salt" in Sanskrit in honor of the epic [Salt March Satyagraha](#) -- met Gandhi and dedicated the rest of his life to the uplifting of all (Sarvodaya).

What follows is a quote of the late Gandhi most likely influenced by this friendship, a couple of letters and a couple of their interactions in Sevagram.



An Atheist's Faith In Humanity And My Religion (Sep 09, 1946)

"You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all these in me is my religion." ~ M.K. Gandhi (1)

Gora writes: "Sometime in March 1946 or so, I read in the news columns that Bapuji wanted his camp at Bombay to be arranged in the huts of Harijans. He followed up the decision in Delhi also where he stayed in the Harijan Mandir. His decision had considerable significance in view of the inhuman segregation imposed upon the Harijans in India. So I immediately wrote my congratulations to him and said:

"I and my coworkers have been trying this method of residing and eating with the Harijans for the last five or six years. Our experience proves that it is an efficient method to remove the social isolation of the untouchables. But our work is spreading slowly. If a man like Bapuji took it up, as he did at Bombay, it is bound to gain wide publicity and attract more workers to the method.

In this connection, another suggestion might be considered. Side by side with the mixing up, an attempt also might be made to discourage the use of labels of caste and creed which raise imaginary barriers between man and man. Not only should the practice of untouchability go, but the Harijan should not be allowed to continue a Harijan; he should be united with the general stream of humanity. Similarly, the Hindu and Muslim differences might be solved by discarding the labels. Such an attempt will no longer keep the form of communal harmony, but it would lead to the growth of one humanity. Communal harmony presupposes the existence of communities. In one humanity no communities exist. Though a powerful personality like Gandhiji might harmonize communities for a while, when the personal influence weakened, the communities would clash again. So a permanent solution of communal differences is the growth of one-humanity outlook rather than communal harmony." [...]

Gandhi then replies from Harijan Mandir in New Delhi, on April 9th 1946:

Dear Ramachandra Rao (Gora),

I have your letter. Though there is a resemblance between your thought and practice and mine superficially, I must own that yours is far superior to mine. Having made that admission let me emphasize the fact that deep down there is a fundamental difference between you and me and, therefore, your thought and mine. For you consciously ignore God. Equally consciously, probably more progressively, I rely upon God. Therefore your complaint is hasty. You will be better able to judge if you survive me and vice versa.

Do not think of passing any time with me whilst I am wandering. I may be said to be not wandering when I am in Sevagram. Therefore come to me whenever I am there.

Yours,
Bapu

The second time they met in person, Shri Pyarelal informed Gora that he could meet Gandhi that evening for half an hour at 4 o'clock. He recalls:

[I knew that Bapuji was very particular about punctuality. So I stepped into his apartment exactly at 4 o'clock by my watch. Bapuji who had just finished talking to an interviewer, looked at me and then at his watch and said to me smilingly]

Gandhi: You are half a minute too soon!

Gora: I am sorry, it is 4 o'clock by my watch *[I replied stepping back.]*

Gandhi: No, no, come in, watches may disagree, but let us not. :)

Afterwards in a longer interview Gora writes:

Gora: I want atheism to make a human being self-confident and to establish social and economic equalities nonviolently. Tell me, Bapu, where am I wrong?

[Bapuji listened to my long explanation patiently. Then he sat up in the bed and said slowly]

Gandhi: Yes, I see an ideal in your talk. I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong. We are seekers after truth. We change whenever we find ourselves in the wrong. I changed like that many times in my life. I see you are a worker. You are not a fanatic. You will change whenever you find yourself in the wrong. There is no harm as long as you are not fanatical. Whether you are in the right or I am in the right, results will prove. Then I may go your way or you may come my way; or both of us may go a third way. So go ahead with your work. I will help you, though your method is against mine.

Gora: *[I felt overwhelmed by his magnanimity, I requested]* You are encouraging me, Bapu. I want to be warned of the possible pitfalls in my way, so that I may benefit by your wisdom and experience and minimize my mistakes.

Gandhi: It is not a mistake to commit a mistake, for no one commits a mistake knowing it to be one. But it is a mistake not to correct the mistake after knowing it to be one. **If you are afraid of committing a mistake, you are afraid of doing anything at all.** You will correct your mistakes whenever you find them.

Gora: *[Then he inquired into my conception of morality]* I do what I say and I say what I do -- that is my definition of moral behaviour. There is no room for secrecy. All behaviour is moral that is open.

Gandhi: Exactly. I would put it, 'secrecy is sin'. You are an atheist. You fight shy of the term sin.

[He described to me some of his hard experiences in trying to live openly... We conversed together on the whole for seventy minutes. There was no time limit imposed. It was a heart-to-heart talk. The topics were varied and often related to personal opinions and experiences. Throughout the conversation I was feeling that I was getting closer and closer to Bapu.

Some of his words rang in my ears ever afterwards. "I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong.... I will help you though your method is against mine," showed me the length Bapuji went in courtesy and toleration. Again, "If you are afraid to commit a mistake, you are afraid to do anything at all," struck as a remarkably practical suggestion and a call to bold action. Recollection of the conversation enabled me to improve my behaviour in several respects.] (2)

Source:

- (1) "Talk With A Christian Missionary", Harijan. [CWMG, Vol 92, p. 190-191](#), September 22, 1946.
- (2) [An Atheist With Gandhi](#) by Gora, 1950

Be the Change: This week, try to remove labels of countries and religions in your conversations and relate at the human-to-human level.

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- In Good Faith: Gandhi's radical Hinduism

In Good Faith: Gandhi's radical Hinduism

His endeavour was to encourage a creative 'misreading' of these texts that would help situate Hinduism on the bedrock of ahimsa and satya.

Written by [K.P. Shankaran](#) | Updated: December 4, 2017

Most admirers of M.K. Gandhi, because of his appearance and his constant use of the Vaishnava vocabulary, would believe him to be a deeply religious person. However, Gandhi's claim of being a sanatan Hindu was rejected by Nathuram Godse and his associates. During his trial, Godse claimed that "Gandhiji's views" had always been "detrimental to the Hindu community and its interests".

Godse's political comment that Gandhi had "proved to be the Father of Pakistan" need not surprise us, since we have often heard similar jibes, especially after the resounding victory of Hindutva politics in the last general election. But what I want to look at is Godse's claim that, in spite of Gandhi's declaration that he was a sanatan Hindu, he, in fact, worked against the interest of the Hindu community. Godse did indeed refer to "Gandhiji's betrayal of Hinduism" during the trial. One would have expected historians of modern India to investigate this claim. Unfortunately, there appears to be very little research done on this aspect of Gandhi.

Although Gandhi described himself as a Hindu, a look into his writings reveals that his Hinduism was neither religious nor cultic in the everyday sense. He did not believe in a personal God. He also rejected vigraha worship and rituals of all kind, including Vedic ones. While Gandhi did claim he believed in "all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures" he immediately qualified it by saying that he also believed in all other religious texts in a similar way. Moreover, his acceptance of these texts was not unconditional. Like the Buddha, he did not hesitate to say that

he would retain the right to reject anything in them that, according to him, went against reason and morality.

What Gandhi sought in man was the ethics of satya and ahimsa: “I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral,” he said. It is a fact that he also tolerated admirers of his, like Gora. Why did Gandhi then always use the Hindu vocabulary and idiom, even though he himself only entertained a belief in an impersonal power as the sustainer of all beings (“There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything”, “I don’t regard God as a person”. “Truth for me is God” etc)?

I believe Gandhi did so for two reasons. First, he wanted to reject the vocabulary of the European enlightenment and modernity for the reasons he eloquently articulated in *Hind Swaraj*. This rejection, I must admit, was not total — he retained, surprisingly, the Lockean idea of secularism, not the Indian version of “equal treatment of all religions by the state”. Thus, in the non-hierarchical stateless socialist society (swaraj) that Gandhi envisaged in his constructive programme, religion and caste did not have any role to play. Religion was, in fact, completely eliminated from the public space. Nevertheless, his rejection of the rest of the enlightenment vocabulary forced him to fall back on a vocabulary that he was familiar with and that, indeed, was the vocabulary of the Vaishnava tradition of his parents.

Second, Gandhi, the social reformer, wished to transform Hinduism from an unethical state (the state of himsa and untruth, which he graphically portrayed in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, the letter he wrote to C.F. Andrews), to an ethical state that is founded on ahimsa and satya, and for this, he needed to use his parental Hindu vocabulary and the idiom of the Vaishnava tradition. The technique Gandhi adopted for this purpose was the same as the one the Buddha used 2,500 years before him — to transform the Brahminism of his time into an ethically better practice. Both these thinkers attempted to redefine the vocabulary of the target group. The Buddha set an example by redefining words like “out-caste” and “Brahmin”, saying “by one’s action one would become either a Brahmin or an out-caste, not by birth”. This is equivalent to Gandhi’s “We are all Shudras and if we can bring ourselves to believe this, the merger of the Harijans in Savarana Hindus becomes incredibly simple and in course of time, we might be able to reconstruct the old varnas”. Such natural reconstruction, according to Gandhi, would be totally egalitarian. Gandhi’s refusal to get rid of the expression “varnashrama dharma” was part of his programme of redefining the traditional Hindu vocabulary without seeking the support of a modernist ideology. He tried to change and critique Hinduism from within, without going for an external critique in the way that Ambedkar did.

Gandhi thought the Buddha had failed in his endeavour to ethically improve Hinduism/Brahminism. In a letter written to C.F. Andrews, Gandhi vehemently argued: “Buddhism, conceived as a doctrine of universal forbearance... failed and if the legends are true, the great Shankaracharya did not hesitate to use unspeakable cruelty in banishing Buddhism out of India.” We know that Gandhi, too, failed. We also know that with the use of the same “unspeakable cruelty”, Gandhi himself was eliminated.

Gandhi attempted to alter the vision of the ordinary Hindu by reinterpreting the Bhagwad Gita in a manner that led Godse and his friends to condemn it as a work that dubbed “Rama, Krishna and Arjuna as guilty of violence.”

By the middle of the 1920s, Gandhi had already acquired pan-Indian acceptability. His translation of the Gita started appearing in the columns of Young India, 1931. The translation and its introduction, called “Anasaktiyoga”, was written for the ordinary people of India who, according to Gandhi “stand in need of its support”. Gandhi introduces the Gita to them as an allegorical text and says that all the personalities that appear in it are products of the imagination of the author. The radical nature of the presentation is mostly overlooked and Gandhi is often presented, for some unknown reasons, as a conventionally religious person by most of his admirers. This is largely because, I presume, in the Indian intellectual discourse, ethics is often confused with religion.

In his interpretation of the Gita as a literary text, Gandhi criticises the author for the thoughtless use of war imagery when, according to Gandhi, the central message of the text is anasakti. Anasakti, Gandhi says, cannot be practised without turning oneself first into a votary and practitioner of ahimsa. Bhakti is reinterpreted in such a way so as to make it synonymous with ahimsa and satya. To remove the divine garb of Krishna, Gandhi treats him simply as a product of the author’s imagination and cautions the reader against the folk tendency to take Krishna as a historical being. Gandhi helps the ordinary reader to treat avatar as a title given to a person who has done exemplary work for the community. Then comes a brilliant ethical principle: That which cannot be done without selfishness ought to be rejected as an evil.

Through his interpretation, Gandhi was attempting to give the ordinary Hindu reader the courage to treat these texts, hitherto considered sacred, not as something that was to be blindly worshipped/followed but as the embodiments of the sanatan of satya and ahimsa. By divesting these sacred texts of their “halo”, Gandhi was trying to do what modernity had done, but acting from within the confines of the traditional vocabulary of a Hindu.

Gandhi believed that sacred texts like the Gita, when interpreted literally, depicted himsa and asatya. His endeavour was to encourage a creative “misreading” of these texts that would help situate Hinduism on the bedrock of ahimsa and satya. He thought it was imperative to transport the reader of these texts to an ethical/spiritual plane. Only this could make Hinduism an ethical religion. Godse and his ilk, by reading these texts literally, could only see justification for himsa and other immoralities.

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The Need for Atheism in Action: Reading “An Atheist with Gandhi”

Vish Carvaka

Wednesday, December 4, 2013 - 7:06pm

A Fistful of Myths

Called “Gora” by all those who knew him, Goparaju Ramchandra Rao (1902 – 1975) was one of the pioneering leaders of the Indian atheist movement. He was a freedom fighter and social reformer who fought against evils such as “untouchability,” poverty and superstition. I came across his [An Atheist with Gandhi](#) recently. It is a swift read, yet deeply insightful of a person who is as widely misunderstood as he is called a *Mahatma*. With a “great soul,” there is usually a lot to misunderstand. Most significantly, it is also revealing of the role and need for atheism in action, working for the uplifting of humanity not only intellectually, but with spade and shovel, the need of which has never been greater.

Initially denied, Gora's persistence pays off as the exchange of letters is succeeded by an invitation to visit Gandhi's “ashram.” The accounts of what follows are precious records so far ignored by mainstream “hagiographers” of Gandhi's life.

Before I describe Gora's findings, there are a fistful of myths to dispel. The term *Mahatma* is not an actual religious title. A 19th century Indian rationalist leader, Jyotirao Phule, who was a pioneer in the Indian uprisings against the atrocities of the prevailing caste system and scriptural dogma, was also bestowed the title of “Mahatma” by his admirers. It would not be possible to do so for a fierce critic of Hindu scripture if the title were a religious one. Mohandas Gandhi never claimed himself to be a saint. Even before this book entered consideration, it would have been a mistake to think that Gandhi was a religious leader, much less a “Hindu fundamentalist,” as described by some critics such as the esteemed Christopher Hitchens. He was a radical reformer who was reviled by the clergy of almost every religion in India. In his lifetime, many Muslim clerics and politicians attacked him as an “enemy of Islam,” while orthodox Hindu leaders despised him for leading the tearing down of the caste system, ending “untouchability” and taking away their position of authority amongst India's masses. On his part, Gandhi made in-depth studies of various religions and criticized them over social injustices and fallacies in teachings. His desperate efforts to preserve India's secular ethic cost him his life at the hands of a Hindu fascist. However, he did not make a conscious leap towards atheism.

What is “Atheism in Action”?

Gora finds Gandhi initially dismissive of atheism as a “denial of self,” an absence of morality and a spiritual vacuum inconceivable. After several attempts at correspondence, Gora finds himself invited to stay at Gandhi's ashram, but does not receive an appointment to meet with him until much later. When he finally meets Gandhi, he realizes that Gandhi had spent the preceding days inquiring with Gora's colleagues about his work in fighting “untouchability” and the positive results he produced. “Untouchability,” an abominable mixture of socio-religious slavery and segregation based on the insidious “caste system,” affected hundreds of millions of people then and no small numbers even today. Gandhi felt Indians were unworthy of independence until these evil practices were ended. It was Gandhi's ascertaining that Gora was not merely an intellectual desiring idle talk that finally sparked his interest. First questioned on his work, Gora spoke of his organizing inter-community dining and adult education classes. When challenged by Gandhi that such work was not unique to atheism, Gora replies:

“Acceptance of atheism at once pulls down caste and religious barriers between man and man. There is no longer a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian. All are human beings. Further, the atheistic outlook puts man on his legs. There is neither divine will nor fate to control his actions. The release of free will awakens Harijans and the depressed classes from the stupor of inferiority into which they were pressed all these ages when they were made to believe that they were fated to be untouchables... After all it is man that created god to make society moral and to silence restless inquisitiveness about the how and the why of natural phenomena. Of course god was useful though a falsehood. But like all falsehoods, belief in god also gave rise to many evils in course of time and today it is not only useless but harmful to human progress. So I take to the propagation of atheism as an aid to my work. The results justify my choice.” (pg. 25)

When Gandhi says he not find the spread of atheism to be healthy, and muses a “fast” against it, he is struck with Gora's two-fold response – (1) that he would fast against Gandhi's fast, and (2) his conviction in atheism was steadfast but if Gandhi could point out where atheism was wrong, he would happily change his view.

When Gandhi directly asks “why do you want atheism,” Gora does not flinch from the challenge and does all atheists proud:

“I want ethics to rule and idealism to grow. That can be achieved only when belief in god and fate is done away with and consequently the theistic philosophy of life is changed. In positive terms, I want atheism, so that man shall cease to depend on god and stand firmly on his own legs. In such a man a healthy social outlook will grow, because atheism finds no justification for the economic and social inequalities between man and man. The inequalities have been kept so far by the acquiescence of the mass of theists rather than by any force of arms. When the belief in god goes and when man begins to stand on his own legs, all humanity becomes one and equal, because not only do men resemble much more than they differ but fellow-feeling smoothens the differences. I cannot remove god, if god were the truth. But it is not so. God is a falsehood conceived by man. Like many falsehoods, it was, in the past, useful to some extent. But like all falsehoods, it polluted life in the long run. So belief in god can go and it must go now in order to wash off corruption and to increase morality in mankind. I want atheism to make man self-

confident and to establish social and economic equalities non-violently. Tell me, Bapu (Father), where am I wrong?" (pgs. 33-34)

Knowing Gandhi's own religiosity and perhaps expecting a severe reaction, Gora felt "overwhelmed" when he found Gandhi encouraging him:

"Yes, I see an ideal in your talk. I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong. We are seekers after truth. We change whenever we find ourselves in the wrong. I changed like that many times in my life. I see you are a worker. You are not a fanatic. You will change whenever you find yourself in the wrong. There is no harm as long as you are not fanatical. Whether you are in the right or I am in the right, results will prove. Then I may go your way or you may come my way; or both of us may go a third way. So go ahead with your work. I will help you, though your method is against mine." (pg. 34)

"Fundamentalists," by definition, do not even consider such possibilities. Never has a Pat Robertson or an Imam Khomeini been prepared to concede to an atheist that *"I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong."* Gandhi was himself on the lookout for fanaticism, and pleased to find none in the Indian atheist. Gora is perhaps testing Gandhi's sincerity when he asks for guidance to "minimize my mistakes," to which Gandhi replies:

"It is not a mistake to commit a mistake, for no one commits a mistake knowing it to be one. But it is a mistake not to correct the mistake after knowing it to be one. If you are afraid of committing a mistake, you are afraid of doing anything at all. You will correct your mistakes whenever you find them." (pg. 34)

Of course, it is the trademark practice of the religious to continue with their mistakes even after they are made plain, but for the context of this conversation in 1945, I am prepared to accept that Gandhi and Gora had now established a sincere connection. Upon finding an atheist he could communicate with, admittedly on his terms, the 76-year old "Mahatma" was nevertheless more than willing to change his preconceived notions about atheism.

"Truth" is "God"?

A working relationship has also been formed, and Gora takes away from Gandhi a sense to intensify his anti-casteism campaign by facilitating inter-caste marriage. Gandhi later agrees to host the marriage of Gora's daughter, who is marrying a man of the "untouchable" class. When informed that Gora's prospective son-in-law is also an atheist and the family is concerned about the "divine blessing" bestowed on other couples who marry at the ashram, Gandhi promises to replace "in the name of God" with "in the name of Truth," for "atheists also respect truth." (pg. 37) The conversation then takes an interesting twist:

Gandhi: The concepts of truth may differ. But all admit and respect truth. That truth I call God. For some time, I was saying, 'God is Truth,' but that did not satisfy me. So now I say, 'Truth is God.'

Gora: *If truth is god, then why don't you say 'Satyam ... ' (Truth) instead of 'Raghupati Raghava'? 'Raghupati Raghava' conveys to others a meaning very different from what it conveys to you.*

We could further argue that the worth of “Truth” does not need enhancement, and especially not through being related with a deity of any kind, but one can still appreciate the direction of Gandhi's thinking, for he is putting reality before the theological conception. Upon the question of his prospective son-in-law, Arjun Rao, joining Gandhi's ashram, Gora expresses a concern that he may be coerced into participating in religious activities. Gandhi says that the young man should attend prayers to instill discipline, but does not have to recite the verses if he does not believe in them.

I initially pictured a slight grin on Gandhi's face when he asks Gora, “*Suppose in the two years that Arjun Rao sits regularly at the prayers, he turns towards theism?*” However, I realized this leg of the conversation was only half-humorous. Gora replied that he would welcome it, as he did not want anyone to be “an atheist with a closed mind.” In turn, Gandhi says, “*Oh, yes. I know you are not a fanatic. Instead of Arjun Rao taking to theism, it looks as if both of you will carry this old man into your camp!*” (pg. 38)

Gora's debate with Gandhi carries into the political arena, with some very relevant results. When drafting the pledge of the Indian National Congress's commitment to the independence of India in 1946, Gora objected to a reference to God. Gandhi offered in compromise a reference to a force that “*we may or may not call divine but we all feel within us.*” Although Gora notes that the very hypothesis of a non-human power of any kind subordinates the free will of humans to it and therefore is inherently theistic, he notes Gandhi's willingness to incorporate different points of view. In 1925, at a point when Gandhi perhaps carried prejudices against atheism, had nevertheless written that he was willing to agree to the removal of the “mention of God” from the pledge of the Congress party if there had been a “conscientious objection” at the time. (pg. 46) A similar debate has been [recently carried out](#) between the U.S. Air Force Academy, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and various anchors at FOX News – with considerable rancor and animosity.

What Do These Observations Mean For Us?

Beyond gaining a deeper understanding of the life and times of a great human being, analyzing Mohandas Gandhi's progressive way of thinking is crucial, for Gandhi and Gora showed in the 1940s what we consider impossible today – a partnership between the theists and the atheists for the greater good of humanity. The foremost lesson that most atheists should carry away with them from reading this most excellent and valuable book is that atheism in action and service can win over more of the religious than merely through intellectual discussions. Atheism must challenge religion not only in the mind, but fuel a person's practical capacity for courageous action and service in challenging times.

This book does not pit an atheist against the leader of a religious establishment but with a singular personality who has a deep connection with an entire nation, which is why the call for

“atheism in action” must be seriously considered for that is an essential way to make a connection with the masses. Mohandas Gandhi's religious views and practices were exhaustive, eccentric and controversial, but also open and evolving. Gandhi never sought to conceal; he wrote extensively about his spiritual experiments, admitted his failings, sought out criticism from colleagues and friends. He repeatedly sought to persuade his audiences that he was simultaneously a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Parsi and a Jew. One could have sarcastically pointed out to Gandhi that the scriptures of various religions did not share his humanity in allowing multiple allegiances, it requires a closer look to realize that there is more than naïve idealism here. In his book *Gandhi And His Religion*, author Poosapati Appala Raju proposes that Gandhi incorporated secular ideas into a religious nomenclature in order to communicate with India's deeply religious masses – a feature of Indian life that Gandhi did not think would change anytime soon. For all of Gandhi's religiosity, he was determined that an independent India would be a secular republic.

Perhaps Gandhi's final utterance on the subject came amidst his efforts to end the seemingly inexhaustible cycle of bloodbaths between Muslims and Hindus in 1946 and 1947. Having journeyed through parts of India engulfed in an atmosphere of terror fomented by medieval-style barbarism, Gandhi was reported as having “*wished the communalists turned atheists if that served to stop communal hatred and riots.*” (pg. 39) Whilst the sentiment is more due to anguish than conviction, we are reminded that Gandhi lived for the sake of humanity and not religious loyalties and dogma.

Gora's testimony of him shows us that he was still prepared at a late age to move from a state of mind where “atheism” meant “immoral,” to understanding that atheism was a path of sincere and genuine humanity, and accepting that he could not say his theism was correct and atheism was not. He supported the work of the atheists to make sure that the goal of uplifting India's people was being accomplished. This attitude is almost universally absent from religious leaders today. They value their own sense of righteousness and power above the greater good of humanity, which is why they often relish the frequent plunges into senseless barbarism to elevate their faith ever so closer to the imaginary realm of divinity.

India and the world were enriched significantly by the lives and work of Mohandas Gandhi and G. Ramachandra Rao. While the intellectual atheist would have continued to find Gandhi a sparring partner, he would be the kind worth sparring with. When the atheist in question was a worker, a person who wanted to make a real difference for humanity, he found the Mahatma standing by his side, a formidable ally.

“He was moving humanity and he was moving with humanity. He started with a humanity that believed in god of the 'Raghupati Raghava' type. As he pushed forward, he passed through the stages of 'God is Truth' and 'Truth is God'. He never allowed old forms to hamper the progress. If he felt that the progress of humanity required leaving god altogether, I am sure, he was not the man to hesitate.”

- G. Ramachandra Rao, “Gora,” on Mahatma Gandhi (pg. 47)

An Atheist with Gandhi is freely available to be [read online](#) and to [download](#)

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